



Monstrosity and the Boundaries of Humanity in Gothic Literature: A Critical Study of Frankenstein

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative study critically examines monstrosity and the boundaries of humanity in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, focusing on how the novel constructs, challenges, and transforms the concept of the monstrous. The study adopts a qualitative research approach and employs a descriptive-interpretive textual research design. The novel serves as the primary source of data, while purposive sampling is used to select significant passages, dialogues, character descriptions, and narrative episodes directly relevant to monstrosity, humanity, Otherness, social rejection, isolation, scientific ambition, and identity formation. Data are analyzed through close textual reading and thematic analysis, with recurring textual patterns coded and organized into broader interpretive themes. The analysis is theoretically informed by Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, together with the concepts of Otherness, the monstrous body, boundary transgression, and social exclusion. The findings reveal that monstrosity is initially constructed through the creature's unnatural creation and grotesque physical appearance but gradually develops through social rejection, abandonment, isolation, and psychological suffering. The analysis further demonstrates that Shelley destabilizes the human-monster binary by presenting the creature as intellectually capable, emotionally conscious, and desirous of companionship, while Victor's scientific ambition, irresponsibility, and obsessive pursuit introduce forms of moral monstrosity within the human subject. The study concludes that monstrosity in *Frankenstein* is not an exclusively inherent physical condition but a complex and relational identity shaped by bodily difference, social perception, exclusion, ethical failure, and individual agency. The study contributes to Gothic literary scholarship by demonstrating how Shelley uses the figure of the monster to interrogate the unstable boundaries through which humanity defines itself.

Introduction

Gothic Literature and the Problem of Monstrosity

Gothic literature has a unique spot in English Studies for a number of reasons. One of these is the literature's obsession with fear, death, and isolation paired with psychological disturbance, unnatural transformation, and the breaking of boundaries and order. A key feature of the Gothic genre is its obsession with the monster. More often than not, monsters in Gothic literature elicit some sort of fear, but this alone does not make the monster significant. More times than not, authors use the monster to interrogate fears in society relating to identity, ethics, embodiment, social exclusion, the boundaries of humanity, and the unknown. In this way, the monster becomes a symbol that reflects the boundaries and the division between what is normal and what is not, what is human and what is not, what is civilized and what is not, what is the self and what is the other. Erle and Hendry (2020) state that the great deal of the creature's continued cultural relevance is a result of the conflicting questions regarding the creature's origin, identity, death, birth, family, and what it means to be human.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), in the Gothic tradition, is a seminal work on the subject of monstrosity and humanity. Here, Shelley does not present the monster as a supernatural evil outside of humanity. Instead, she shapes a creature that is intelligent, human, and sensitive and, in this way, a monster, yet also deeply hostile because of his rejection. In this way, the creature is completely contradictory, and thus, a complex Gothic creation. According to Ruttkay (2010), *Frankenstein* is a seminal text in Romantic monstrosity and relates the figure of the monster to larger concerns of knowledge, uncertainty, and the bounds of human comprehension.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the Gothic Imagination

Mary Shelley published *Frankenstein* in 1818, and the novel reflects several major concerns of Romanticism, including nature, imagination, individualism, scientific knowledge, and the limits of human understanding. Within the context of Gothic Romanticism, Shelley creatively synthesizes the tensions of her time to construct a narrative in which the fusion of scientific ambition and imagination produces a being that challenges social and ethical boundaries of personhood. Victor Frankenstein attempts to impose his will upon the laws of nature by animating a corpse. Although he initially appears to have realized the potential of human intellect, his actions ultimately constitute a radical violation of the natural order. The creature he brings into existence subsequently repulses Victor, who abandons the being rather than accepting responsibility for his creation. Thus, the narrative foregrounds the ethical and moral burden associated with scientific advancement and emphasizes the consequences of pursuing knowledge without sufficient ethical restraint (Özdemir, 2003).

A substantial body of scholarship has examined the relationship between scientific advancement and ethical responsibility in *Frankenstein*. Cambra-Badii et al. (2020), in their analysis of *Frankenstein* and ethics, demonstrate that the novel has been extensively examined in relation to science, technology, bioethics, medicine, and scientific responsibility. They emphasize the ethical significance of the novel, particularly the responsibility of scientists for both the motivations underlying their experiments and the consequences that follow from them. Similarly, Reginato et al. (2021) argue that *Frankenstein* illustrates the ethical complexity of scientific progress and provides an important foundation for examining responsibility, scientific ethics, and the need for a responsible civil society.

Monstrosity as a Question of Humanity

The question of whether *Frankenstein's* creature should be regarded as a human being rather than merely a monster emerges through his psychological development and emotional experiences. Although Victor's creation initially appears to conform to the conventional image of the Gothic monster, his subsequent development reveals considerable psychological and emotional complexity. The creature learns language, observes human behavior, develops emotional attachments, experiences loneliness, and expresses a profound desire for affection and social acceptance. He also demonstrates a strong desire to communicate and an extraordinary capacity to experience suffering (Petsche, 2014).

The humanity of the creature is therefore located not in his physical appearance but in his consciousness and emotional experience. This distinction is particularly significant because it demonstrates that biological or physical characteristics do not necessarily determine an individual's moral character. Although the creature possesses a grotesque appearance, Shelley portrays him as capable of sensitivity, compassion, and emotional reflection. In contrast, Victor Frankenstein, despite possessing a conventionally human body, demonstrates selfishness, irresponsibility, and obsessive ambition. This contrast between physical appearance and moral character constitutes one of the novel's most significant critiques of conventional boundaries between

humanity and monstrosity. As Walter (2018) argues, the creature's narration and experiences constitute an important foundation for the novel's ethical concerns and compel readers to consider the responsibilities associated with scientific creation and the consequences of creating a sentient being and subsequently abandoning it.

Physical Appearance and the Monstrous Body

Shelley places the monstrous body at the center of the novel's exploration of identity and humanity. Victor's creation of the creature involves the assembly of human body parts, and once the experiment succeeds, the creature's physical appearance becomes the primary source of fear and rejection. The creature consequently occupies an ambiguous position between the familiar and the unfamiliar. His body is recognizably human in structure but simultaneously perceived as grotesque, unnatural, and disturbing. Through this ambiguity, Shelley encourages readers to question whether physical appearance should determine who is considered human (Bernatchez, 2009).

The creature's body also functions as a site of social criticism. Other characters respond to his physical appearance before they have an opportunity to understand his intentions, personality, or emotional capacities. Consequently, his body becomes a defining feature of his social identity before he is able to establish an identity for himself through meaningful social relationships. These dynamic shifts the discussion of monstrosity away from the conventional assumption that monsters are inherently violent and toward an examination of how social and visual judgments contribute to the construction of monstrosity. The creature's hostility can consequently be interpreted partly as a response to the physical and social exclusion he experiences. His violence develops within a context of repeated rejection, suggesting that social exclusion contributes to his psychological suffering and subsequent violent behavior (Farzand, 2025).

Victor Frankenstein and the Creation of the Monster

Although the creature is commonly identified as the "monster" of the novel, Shelley also uses Victor Frankenstein's character to reveal the more complex dimensions of monstrosity. Victor's initial motivation appears to be intellectual and, to some extent, altruistic. He seeks to discover the unknown and understand the fundamental principles of life. However, his pursuit of knowledge gradually becomes excessive and uncontrollable. His ambition ultimately produces an ethical blind spot concerning the consequences of his actions. Most importantly, Victor creates a living being but fails to accept the responsibility associated with bringing that being into existence. Immediately after the creature's creation, he abandons him rather than providing care, guidance, or companionship (Rigby, 2006).

In this respect, Victor may be considered as important to the novel's exploration of monstrosity as the creature himself. The themes of responsibility, creation, and ethical failure are embodied particularly strongly in Victor's actions. The novel's concern with responsibility is evident in his failure to care for the being to whom he has given life. His abandonment of the creature illustrates how scientific achievement without ethical responsibility can produce destructive consequences (Ivaniš, 2025). The creature, therefore, cannot be fully understood without considering the creator whose actions initiated his suffering and subsequent transformation.

Frankenstein demonstrates the complex relationship between scientific knowledge and moral responsibility. Victor's experiment crosses one of the most fundamental boundaries of human experience by attempting to overcome the distinction between life and death. Shelley does not present scientific curiosity as inherently good or inherently evil. Instead, the novel demonstrates that scientific knowledge can produce both beneficial and harmful consequences depending on how it is pursued and applied. Victor's central problem is therefore not simply his desire for knowledge but his pursuit of knowledge without adequate ethical constraints (Richter, 1987).

The Gothic Monster as a Reflection of Society

The monster can also be interpreted as a projection of society's fears, prejudices, and stereotypes. Gothic literature frequently positions the monster as a representation of the social outsider or marginalized individual, and Shelley develops this convention by giving her creature a voice. Rather than allowing the creature to remain a silent object of fear, Shelley enables him to narrate his own experiences, articulate his emotions, and explain the circumstances that have shaped his behavior. Through this narrative strategy, the creature can be interpreted not simply as a monster but also as a victim of social rejection and abandonment.

Grozdić (2025) argues that representations of the creature in popular culture have shifted between contrasting interpretations, ranging from the grotesque, dangerous, and unnatural figure to representations of innocence and embodiments of modern social

fears. These changing interpretations demonstrate the enduring significance of Frankenstein for understanding monstrosity. The creature can simultaneously represent social exclusion, social anxiety, social fear, and the experience of the outsider. His transformation from an initially compassionate being into a violent figure therefore invites readers to consider how society itself contributes to the production of monstrosity.

Critical Significance of the Study

The present study, entitled “Monstrosity and the Boundaries of Humanity in Gothic Literature: A Critical Study of Frankenstein,” examines how Mary Shelley destabilizes conventional definitions of humanity through the figure of the creature. Rather than treating monstrosity as a fixed biological or physical condition, the study conceptualizes it as a complex construction shaped by physical appearance, social rejection, identity, morality, scientific ambition, and interpersonal responsibility. The analysis consequently focuses on the ways in which Shelley presents the creature as simultaneously monstrous and human (Waham, 2023). The study is also significant because it shifts attention from the conventional question of who the monster is toward the more critical question of how monstrosity is produced. Victor’s scientific ambition, his abandonment of the creature, society’s rejection of physical difference, and the creature’s subsequent transformation into a violent figure collectively demonstrate that monstrosity emerges through a complex interaction among creation, perception, exclusion, and responsibility. Shelley’s novel consequently refuses to establish an absolute division between humanity and monstrosity. Instead, it demonstrates how easily one category can become transformed into the other (Freeman, 1987).

Research Objectives

1. To examine the representation of monstrosity in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein.
2. To analyze how the novel challenges conventional boundaries between humanity and monstrosity.
3. To investigate the role of social rejection, isolation, and scientific ambition in shaping the creature’s monstrous identity.

Problem Statement

Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein presents monstrosity as a complex and ambiguous concept that challenges conventional distinctions between the human and the non-human. Although the creature is commonly interpreted as a monster because of his unnatural creation and frightening physical appearance, the novel simultaneously portrays him as an intelligent, emotional, and socially vulnerable being who desires companionship, acceptance, and belonging. The central problem, therefore, lies in the tension between the creature’s physical monstrosity and his capacity for human thought and emotion. Existing interpretations often emphasize the creature’s appearance, violence, or scientific origins, while insufficient attention may be given to how social rejection, isolation, and Victor Frankenstein’s irresponsible creation contribute to the construction of his monstrous identity. This study addresses this problem by critically examining how Shelley destabilizes the boundaries between humanity and monstrosity and demonstrates that monstrosity is shaped not only by physical difference but also by social exclusion, psychological suffering, scientific ambition, and failures of ethical responsibility.

Literature Review

Gothic Literature, Monstrosity, and the Human Condition

Scholarship on Gothic literature has consistently identified monstrosity as one of the genre’s most important mechanisms for examining cultural anxieties about identity, morality, embodiment, and social order. Rather than functioning exclusively as a source of fear, the Gothic monster frequently represents what society defines as abnormal, threatening, or fundamentally different. In this context, monstrosity becomes closely connected with the construction of the “Other,” because the boundaries of normality are often established by excluding particular bodies, behaviours, or identities. The contemporary readings of monsters continue to show that monsters are cultural creations that have different meanings and constructions dependent upon different historical and cultural contexts. Valdebenito Tihuel, C (2023) argue that in the context of monstrosity, fear and the social outsider coalesce and become cultural anxiety. This is evident in Shelley’s Frankenstein, as she has created a literally monstrous character, however the character has human emotions and dignified thoughts.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and the Representation of the Monster

As one of the most influential examples of a creature functioning as a protagonist in literature, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein presents the creature's development while simultaneously challenging conventional representations of the "monster." Rather than providing a straightforward distinction between a monstrous figure and a human villain, Shelley gives the creature the ability to articulate his experiences and demonstrate the development of his intellect. This approach introduces considerable complexity into the traditional Gothic monster narrative. Bewell (1988) argues that Frankenstein contains inherent tones of skepticism and doubt, particularly concerning knowledge, self-identity, and the boundaries of human understanding. These concerns encourage the creature to question both his own identity and the world around him, raising broader questions about the extent to which identity is shaped by socialization rather than by nature alone.

More recent scholarship has continued to examine the complex representation of Shelley's creature. Heise-Von Der (2021) demonstrates that the enduring significance of the Frankenstein figure is partly associated with the difficulty of assigning him a single, stable identity. The creature can simultaneously be interpreted as an artificial and social being, a victim and potential perpetrator, and an entity capable of profound emotional experience. Shelley incorporates this duality by constructing the creature as a paradox that resists a clear opposition between humanity and monstrosity. Instead, the novel suggests that characteristics associated with humanity and monstrosity can coexist within the same individual.

Monstrosity, Otherness, and Social Exclusion

A substantial body of existing literature considers the creature as a representation of Otherness. From his first appearance, he is excluded from human society because of his physical appearance. Whenever he attempts to establish social relationships, he encounters fear, violence, and rejection. Consequently, the creature has frequently been interpreted in terms of social marginalization rather than solely as a supernatural monster. Ordu (2025) argues that monstrosity frequently operates through processes of cultural classification in which difference is transformed into Otherness. This perspective is particularly relevant to Frankenstein, because the creature's exclusion demonstrates how social rejection can influence the development of individual identity.

The creature's relationship with the De Lacey family further illustrates this process. Through observing the family, he gradually learns to understand emotional relationships, social interaction, language, and the moral structures that organize human society. His desire to live peacefully among others is demonstrated through his wish to become part of the family. However, this desire is ultimately rejected, reinforcing his position at the margins of society. The creature's experience therefore suggests that monstrosity is not simply an inherent characteristic but can also emerge through social interaction and exclusion. His transformation cannot be separated from the repeated experiences of rejection and marginalization that he encounters while attempting to establish relationships with human beings (Cardillo, 2022).

The Monstrous Body and Physical Difference

The relationship between the creature's body, social perception, and aesthetic judgment is another important concern in scholarship on Frankenstein. Although Victor Frankenstein constructs the creature from the remains of multiple human corpses, the resulting body is perceived as fundamentally different from an aesthetically acceptable human form. The creature's physical appearance becomes the principal basis for Victor's rejection and significantly influences the reactions of other characters. His body consequently becomes a justification for his exclusion from society and reinforces the perception of his physical difference as abnormal (Cook, 2019).

Scholarship on Gothic embodiment generally demonstrates that the monstrous body challenges culturally accepted definitions of normal physical existence. In Frankenstein, the creature's body destabilizes conventional categories because he is neither naturally born nor entirely artificial, neither conventionally dead nor conventionally alive, and neither completely human nor entirely non-human. Inbaraj and Jinnah (2022) similarly identify the Frankenstein figure as an important representation of the Gothic Other because transformations of the human body can generate anxieties concerning identity and the limits of human existence. The creature's body therefore functions as more than a source of horror; it becomes a site through which culturally established assumptions about humanity, normality, and physical difference are questioned.

Isolation, Identity, and Psychological Transformation

Isolation represents another significant theme in scholarship on *Frankenstein*. Although both Victor Frankenstein and the creature experience isolation, the circumstances producing their isolation are fundamentally different. Victor voluntarily isolates himself through his intense involvement in scientific experimentation, whereas the creature is forcibly excluded from society because of his physical appearance and origins. The different forms of isolation experienced by the two characters gradually contribute to a destructive emotional relationship between creator and creation.

The creature's psychological transformation is particularly significant because his initial disposition differs considerably from his later behaviour. At the beginning of his existence, he expresses a desire for affection, companionship, and social acceptance. However, repeated experiences of rejection gradually produce anger, resentment, and hostility. His eventual acts of violence complicate interpretations that position him exclusively as an innocent victim. Crimmins (2013) emphasizes the tragic and psychologically complex structure of Shelley's Gothic narrative, in which uncertainty and competing forms of responsibility prevent a straightforward moral interpretation of the characters and their actions. Existing scholarship therefore supports an understanding of the creature as neither completely innocent nor inherently evil. Instead, his identity develops through a complex interaction between individual agency, psychological experience, social rejection, and environmental circumstances.

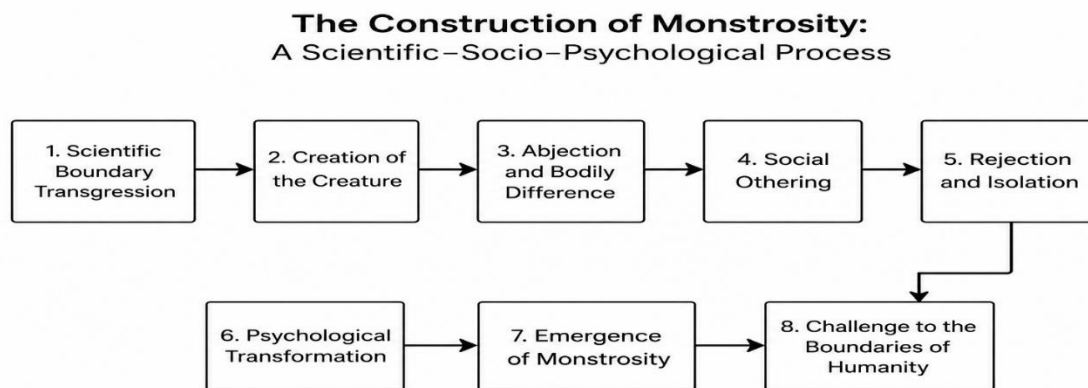


Fig 1: Conceptual Relationship of the Theory

Methodology

Research Approach

This study uses qualitative research in order to analyze the portrayal of monstrosity, the boundaries of humanity, and how both are represented in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The use of qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it focuses more on the literary meanings, and the representation of characters and the social context of the story as opposed to the quantitative measurement. This study is interested in how the concepts of monstrosity are defined by physical appearance, social rejection, isolation, scientific ambition, and ethical responsibility. Analysis is therefore done by close reading of the primary sources together with the supporting literature and the chosen theory.

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative design that is based on descriptive and interpretive research together with textual analysis. With this research design, the author is able to examine and analyze the important passages and descriptions in *Frankenstein* focusing on the dialogues, the narrative descriptions, the interactions of the characters, and the events. The author is able to define and apply the concepts of abjection, Otherness, the monstrous body, boundary transgression, and social exclusion. This research does not focus on establishing relationships and making generalizations. This research intends to create a critical lens for analyzing how Shelley distinguishes and undermines the boundaries of the monstrous and the human.

Research Corpus and Sampling Technique

This study employs purposive sampling when selecting textual segments from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Purposive sampling is applicable to qualitative literary research because, instead of selecting text randomly, passages are selected depending on how relevant they are to the research questions and objectives. The primary corpus consists of the 1818 edition of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, focusing on the chapters related to the creation of the creature and his description, his encounters with the human world, his relationship with Victor, his experiences with isolation and rejection, the development of his language, growth of awareness, feelings, and consciousness, and his violent behavior, as well as his including his relationship with his creator and the climax.

The selected textual segments are the main focus of the analysis. Secondary sources, including published journal articles, scholarly books, and studies pertaining to Gothic literature, monstrosity, *Frankenstein*, abjection, otherness and the ethics of science, are used to clarify and reinforce the interpretation of the primary source. Secondary sources are also selected purposively and depend on their relevance to the research problem and the theory.

Data Sources

The study relies primarily on documentary and textual data. The primary source is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Secondary data are obtained from peer-reviewed academic publications, scholarly books, and credible academic databases. Sources are searched through databases and scholarly platforms such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Project MUSE, and ScienceDirect, where relevant literature is available. The researcher gives preference to recent scholarship, particularly studies published between 2020 and 2026, while also incorporating foundational theoretical works that are essential to the study, such as Kristeva's work on abjection. Older sources are therefore retained when they constitute foundational theoretical or literary scholarship rather than contemporary empirical evidence.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection begins with several close readings of *Frankenstein* to learn the narrative and identify characters, themes, and major story events. After this, the researcher locates passages related to the study concepts. The relevant passages are then grouped together under preliminary analytical headings/categories such as the physical, social, and scientific aspects of monstrosity and abjection, Otherness, social rejection, isolation, scientific ambition, creation, responsibility, violence, identity, and humanity.

Following the initial textual reading, relevant secondary literature is collected through academic database searches. Search terms include "Frankenstein and monstrosity," "Mary Shelley and Gothic literature," "Frankenstein and humanity," "Frankenstein and Otherness," "Frankenstein and abjection," "Frankenstein monstrous body," "Frankenstein social exclusion," "Frankenstein scientific ethics," and "Gothic literature and monstrosity." The selected scholarship is then read comparatively to identify theoretical arguments and critical perspectives relevant to the interpretation of the primary text.

Data Analysis

This part presents a qualitative textual analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*; or, *The Modern Prometheus*. The primary data for the study consist of selected passages, descriptions, dialogues, and narrative episodes from the novel. The analysis uses close reading and thematic interpretation to examine how Shelley represents monstrosity and constructs the boundary between humanity and the monstrous. The selected textual evidence is interpreted through the theoretical concepts of abjection, Otherness, the monstrous body, social exclusion, isolation, and boundary transgression.

The Creation of the Monstrous Body

The first instance of textually constructing monstrosity occurs when Victor Frankenstein's creation of the creature is described. It takes Victor years to discover the principle of life, and he is driven by scientific ambition, leading him to believe his creation will be beautiful. However, the expectation is immediately hollow when the creature is brought to life.

Shelley writes:

"His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God!"

The use of the word “beautiful” multiple times followed by Victor’s exclamation creates a strong juxtaposition between expectation and reality. Victor has a set expectation of the creature based on the conventional understanding of the beauty of the world, but that changes the moment the creature is endowed with sentience. For Victor, the creature becomes monstrous.

Victor subsequently describes the creature in disturbing physical terms:

“His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness.”

Each small detail of the creature draws the focus of the description to the creature’s body. Features of the creature that are likely to be attractive (e.g. black hair and white teeth) become repulsive. Monstrosity is explained by the distortion of regular spheres of human existence. The creature is a human-like physical body that, in combination, completely defies the idea of human beauty.

From the monstrous body perspective, the creature’s body shows him being other. The otherness sign is visible even before thoughts, emotions, and intentions are processed.

Victor’s Immediate Rejection of His Creation

The creation scene is followed by Victor’s immediate abandonment of the creature. Victor’s reaction is particularly significant because the creature’s first encounter with his creator is not one of recognition or affection but rejection.

Victor states:

“I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished.”

This passage establishes a contradiction between Victor’s scientific ambition and his response to its consequences. Before creation, Victor is obsessed with achieving his scientific objective. After creation, he experiences disgust and fear.

The creature is therefore denied the opportunity to establish a relationship with his creator. Victor’s rejection becomes the first major social experience through which the creature encounters humanity.

The Creature’s Initial Innocence and Vulnerability

Following his abandonment, the creature experiences the world without guidance. Shelley does not immediately present him as violent or evil. Instead, he is initially confused and vulnerable.

The creature recalls:

“I was a poor, helpless, miserable wretch; I knew, and could distinguish, nought.”

The words “poor,” “helpless,” and “miserable” create a representation of vulnerability rather than inherent evil. At this stage, the creature has not yet developed the knowledge necessary to understand human society or even himself.

The Creature’s Discovery of Human Society

The most important part of the novel for demonstrating the creature’s humanity is when he secretly watches the De Lacey family. He watches and learns to understand the relationships of Felix, Agatha, and the blind De Lacey.

He explains:

“I learned that the possessions most esteemed by your fellow-creatures were, high and unsullied descent united with riches.”

This observation demonstrates the creature’s ability to analyze human society critically. He does not merely observe human behaviour; he develops an understanding of social hierarchy, wealth, family, and status.

For him, it provides an understanding of social and moral distinctions, and of social and personal distinctions.

His observations become an understanding of self and of the differences that humans make in their judgments of one another.

Acquisition of Language

The creature's listening to the De Laceys teaches him words and their meanings.

The creature explains:

"I cannot describe the delight I experienced on discovering the ideas appropriated to each of these sounds and was able to pronounce them."

The emphasis on "ideas" demonstrates that the creature does not simply imitate sounds. He connects language with concepts and develops abstract understanding.

Language for humanity creates self-consciousness, and the creature begins to understand his exclusion from humanity.

Shelley gives the supposedly non-human creature one of the most important components of civilization, language, which becomes a key element of the dilemma of the monster.

The Creature's Desire for Human Connection

The creature's observations of the De Lacey family generate a strong desire for companionship. He does not initially wish to destroy humanity. Instead, he desires to become part of the social world he observes.

He states:

"I ardently desired the love and sympathy of man."

This statement is particularly significant for the present study because it directly contradicts the assumption that the creature is naturally hostile toward human beings.

The words "love" and "sympathy" reveal his emotional needs. He seeks precisely the qualities that are generally associated with human social existence.

His desire for companionship therefore becomes textual evidence of his humanity. The creature may be physically monstrous, but his emotional desires are recognizably human.

The Creature as the Social Other

Although he longs for social acceptance, the creature continually faces social rejection due to his appearance. From the perspective of the creature's encounters with human beings, society has the ability to make a social judgment about him even before they get the opportunity of looking at his personality. In this manner, the creature demonstrates the idea of Otherness. Otherness becomes social exclusion through a social process which works on the premise of social difference.

The creature explains his painful realization:

"I was dependent on none and related to none."

This statement expresses his complete absence of social belonging. He has no family, community, or recognized identity.

This man illustrates the idea of Otherness. He falls out of social recognition of humanity because of his appearance, and therefore because of his appearance, is prevented from people seeing his emotional and intellectual resemblances.

This explains that Otherness is not just having a different physical appearance. It is the social process of differentiation that creates exclusion.

The De Lacey Encounter

The creature's attempt to approach the De Lacey family provides perhaps the clearest textual evidence concerning appearance and humanity. Because the blind De Lacey cannot see him, the creature hopes that communication will be possible.

The creature explains:

"I am blind and cannot judge your countenance, but there is something in your words which persuades me that you are sincere."

In this case, the relationship which exists between sight and judgment becomes important. Blind De Lacey makes a judgment about the creature based on his words and as a result, he is capable of perceiving the creature's emotional honesty.

On the other hand, the reaction of Felix, Agatha, and Safie towards the creature underwent a complete transformation. They reacted with fear and violence in the presence of his appearance.

From this perspective we can say that the creature's humanity is more visible when he is not judged based on his appearance.

Shelley therefore constructs a powerful distinction:

The unseen creature can be heard and understood, whereas the visible creature is immediately feared and rejected.

This episode strongly supports the interpretation that physical appearance is a social barrier preventing recognition of the creature's humanity.

Rejection and Psychological Suffering

Following the rejection by the De Lacey family, the creature experiences intense emotional suffering. His disappointment is particularly painful because he had invested considerable hope in the possibility of social acceptance.

He states:

"I had been moved by the desire of becoming an actor in the busy scene where so many admirable qualities were called forth."

The creature's desire to participate in human society demonstrates that he does not see himself as naturally separate from humanity. He wants to become a participant in the social world.

Psychologically, his rejection has an enormous influence on him. The creature has come to believe that no matter what he does, he will not be socially accepted.

The analysis shows that Shelley wants to show the audience that social exclusion is the most powerful influence on a person as it defines his/her identity. In the case of the creature, social exclusion has been the only influence on his life.

The Creature's Recognition of His Otherness

As the creature becomes more knowledgeable, he increasingly recognizes his difference from human beings.

He asks:

"What was I? The question again recurred, to be answered only with groans."

This question represents a crisis of identity. The creature possesses consciousness but lacks a stable social identity.

His question "What was I?" is especially important because it demonstrates that identity is not simply biologically given. The creature requires social recognition to understand his position in the world.

It is only when he is able to understand how people perceive him that his appearance begins to have a psychological relevance.

The text therefore connects physical difference → social rejection → identity crisis.

The Creature's Demand for a Companion

The creature eventually confronts Victor and asks him to create a female companion.

He explains:

"I am alone and miserable; man will not associate with me."

This statement explicitly connects his suffering with social exclusion. The creature identifies loneliness as the central problem of his existence.

The creature asks Victor for companionship first, not the right to dominate or control humans.

The creature desires companionship with another being to recognize his existence.

The female companion therefore represents more than a second monster. She symbolizes the possibility of overcoming Otherness and establishing an alternative form of community.

Victor's Destruction of the Companion

Victor initially begins constructing the female creature but later destroys the unfinished body.

The creature witnesses this event, and rightfully so, becomes angry- Victor once again has refused him companionship.

He declares:

"I shall be with you on your wedding-night."

This statement marks a significant transformation in the creature's relationship with Victor. His desire for companionship has been transformed into a threat of revenge.

The Transformation from Victim to Avenger

Destroying the creature's potential companionship turns the creature from victim to avenger.

The creature continues revenge against Victor; however, he recognizes the effect his actions have as he continues his revenge against Victor.

He states:

"If I have no ties and no affections, hatred and vice must be my portion."

This statement is central to the textual construction of monstrosity. The creature explicitly connects the absence of affection with the development of hatred.

The transformation should not lead one to believe violence is an outgrowth of social rejection, but the creature perceives his transformation.

The Murder of William

The death of William is a clear indicator of the Creature's revenge extending beyond Victor.

The Creature uses Victor's family as a way to take revenge against him.

This episode complicates the earlier representation of the creature as a purely sympathetic victim. His actions now demonstrate agency and moral responsibility.

Nevertheless, Shelley places these actions within the larger narrative of rejection. The creature has experienced abandonment, isolation, and repeated social exclusion before committing the murders.

The textual evidence therefore supports a complex interpretation in which the creature is simultaneously victim and perpetrator.

Victor as a Figure of Monstrosity

The focus of the analysis has to shift from the Creature to Victor, as the actions of Victor Challenges the definition of the monstrous within the novel.

Victor's actions transcend the bounds of sanity, and are a natural extension of his domination over life and death.

His behaviour therefore creates an ethical contradiction: he possesses the power of creation but rejects the responsibility of care.

Victor's monstrosity is therefore primarily moral and ethical, whereas the creature's monstrosity is initially primarily physical and social.

The contrast between the two characters is central to Shelley's critique of simplistic definitions of monstrosity.

The Doubling of Victor and the Creature

As the narrative progresses, Victor and the creature become increasingly similar.

The creature declares:

"I will revenge my injuries; if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear."

Victor, meanwhile, becomes increasingly consumed by the desire to destroy the creature.

Both characters therefore become isolated and obsessed with revenge.

Their relationship produces a form of Gothic doubling. Victor creates the creature, but the creature subsequently shapes Victor's existence. Victor pursues the creature, while the creature pursues Victor.

The boundary between creator and creation therefore becomes increasingly unstable.

The Creature's Self-Reflection

The creature's final appearance provides important evidence against interpreting him as a simple Gothic villain.

After Victor's death, the creature expresses remorse and grief. He acknowledges the destructive consequences of his actions.

He states:

"I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames."

His decision to destroy himself demonstrates that his revenge has not produced satisfaction or happiness.

Instead, he recognizes that his existence has become dominated by suffering.

This final self-reflection preserves the complexity of his character. Even after committing violent acts, he remains capable of moral consciousness.

Humanity and Monstrosity as Unstable Categories

The cumulative textual evidence demonstrates that Shelley does not maintain a stable distinction between human beings and monsters.

The creature possesses a monstrous body but demonstrates language, emotional consciousness, empathy, and the desire for companionship.

Victor possesses a conventionally human body but demonstrates scientific obsession, abandonment, revenge, and ethical irresponsibility.

The text therefore creates a reversal:

The monster possesses humanity, while the human demonstrates monstrosity.

This reversal is central to the novel's Gothic significance.

The creature's physical appearance initially encourages the reader to classify him as monstrous. However, his narrative voice gradually destabilizes this judgment.

Integrated Textual Interpretation

The textual analysis demonstrates that the creature's identity changes throughout the narrative. He begins as a newly conscious and vulnerable being. He then becomes an observer of humanity, an educated individual, a seeker of companionship, a rejected outsider, and finally an avenger.

The transformation can be represented textually as:

Creation → Abandonment → Learning → Desire for Belonging → Rejection → Isolation → Identity Crisis → Demand for Companionship → Further Rejection → Revenge → Violence → Remorse.

This example illustrates that the creature's identity can change. Shelley depicts monstrosity as a process that is the result of the interaction between the individual and society.

Discussion

This part discusses the findings generated through the qualitative textual analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* in relation to the three research questions of the study. Rather than repeating the textual analysis, the discussion interprets the major findings in relation to the theoretical framework of the study, particularly the concepts of abjection, Otherness, the monstrous body, social exclusion, boundary transgression, and identity formation. The discussion demonstrates that Shelley's representation of monstrosity is considerably more complex than a simple opposition between a human protagonist and a non-human monster. Through the creature's physical construction, emotional development, rejection by society, and eventual transformation into an avenger, Shelley destabilizes the boundary between humanity and monstrosity.

Research Question One: How is monstrosity represented in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*?

The textual analysis finds that Shelley represents monstrosity in *Frankenstein* as a multidimensional phenomenon rather than merely a matter of physical appearance. The creature's monstrous identity develops through the interaction of his grotesque body, unnatural creation, social rejection, psychological suffering, and eventual violent behaviour. Although his physical appearance initially establishes him as a Gothic monster, his early behaviour is characterized by curiosity, vulnerability, learning, and a desire for acceptance, demonstrating that physical and moral monstrosity are not initially equivalent. His later violence emerges within a context of repeated social exclusion and psychological suffering, which progressively transforms his identity. The findings therefore indicate that monstrosity is constructed through the combined effects of physical difference, social perception, rejection, emotional suffering, and individual actions. This interpretation also highlights the ethical relationship between the creation of life and responsibility (Quach, 2013). Thus, the first research question is answered by demonstrating that Shelley presents monstrosity as a complex interaction between the physical, psychological, social, and moral dimensions of the creature's existence.

Research Question Two: How does *Frankenstein* challenge the conventional boundary between humanity and monstrosity?

The second research question finds that Shelley destabilizes the boundary between humanity and monstrosity by distinguishing physical appearance from internal character. Although the creature initially appears to be outside the human social order, his development of language, intellectual abilities, moral judgment, emotional awareness, sympathy, and desire for love and companionship reveals distinctly human qualities. His interaction with the De Lacey family further demonstrates that monstrosity is partly constructed through social perception: the blind De Lacey responds positively to the creature's communication because he cannot see his appearance, whereas the family's fear emerges once they see him.

The findings also contrast the creature with Victor Frankenstein. While the creature possesses a monstrous body but demonstrates human emotions and a capacity for moral reflection, Victor possesses a human body but increasingly exhibits destructive and irresponsible behaviour through his scientific ambition and abandonment of the creature. Thus, the human/monster distinction becomes ethical and psychological rather than purely biological. Consistent with Aziz (2025) and de Courville-Nicol (1997), the findings suggest that Shelley is more concerned with the social and ethical conditions that produce distinctions between humans and monsters than with establishing a fixed boundary between the two. Overall, the second research question demonstrates that *Frankenstein* challenges conventional definitions of humanity by associating it with consciousness, emotional development, moral reflection, relationships, and responsibility.

Research Question Three: How do social rejection, isolation, and scientific ambition contribute to the construction of the creature's monstrous identity?

The third research question examines how the creature's monstrous identity develops throughout *Frankenstein*. The analysis shows that Victor Frankenstein's scientific ambition creates the creature, but abandonment, social rejection, and isolation gradually shape his transformation into a figure perceived as monstrous. Victor's greatest failure is not simply creating life but

refusing to take responsibility for the being he has created, leaving the creature without parental care, emotional support, or a social identity.

The creature's encounters with society reinforce this rejection because people judge him primarily by his frightening appearance rather than his intentions. His observation of the De Lacey family makes him increasingly aware of the companionship and belonging he desires but cannot attain. Similarly, education gives him greater knowledge and understanding, but this knowledge also deepens his awareness of his exclusion from human society. His request for a companion represents his final attempt to establish a meaningful relationship; however, Victor's destruction of the female creature eliminates this possibility and intensifies his feelings of hatred and resentment.

The study therefore identifies a developmental progression from scientific creation to abandonment, social rejection, isolation, desire for belonging, repeated rejection, resentment, and ultimately revenge. However, this process is not presented as deterministic. Although social rejection explains the development of the creature's identity and behavior, it does not completely excuse his later violence. His murders demonstrate that he retains individual agency and moral responsibility.

Overall, the findings support the thesis that monstrosity in *Frankenstein* is largely socially constructed rather than inherent. Victor's scientific ambition initiates the creature's existence, while his abandonment and society's rejection contribute significantly to the development of the creature's monstrous identity. Shelley therefore presents monstrosity as the result of an interaction between social circumstances, psychological suffering, and individual choices, rather than portraying the creature as naturally evil.

Conclusion

The discussion demonstrates that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* fundamentally questions the assumption that humanity and monstrosity are clearly separable categories. The creature's physical body initially establishes him as a Gothic monster, but his intellectual development, emotional consciousness, desire for companionship, and capacity for self-reflection repeatedly challenge this classification.

Yet at the same time, both Victor's scientific ambition and ethical lack create further problems for Victor's role as the 'civilized' human protagonist. The creature's violence later on shows that social rejection does not eliminate personal accountability, but the story constructs a strong connection between rejecting someone and their psychological transformation. The conclusion of the study shows that Shelley constructs monstrous identity by combining the body, social perception, science, isolation, psychological anguish, and personal accountability. The creature becomes monstrous not because he is aesthetically different but because of repeated rejections of his presence and the generalized perception of him as a menace. *Frankenstein* reframes the Gothic monster to ask what it means to be human.

Future Implications

Future research could discuss *Frankenstein*'s monstrosity and human identity in relation to other Gothic and contemporary works that deal with artificial creation, bodily difference, and social exclusion. It could also trace the changes that have occurred in the literary representation of monsters from the nineteenth century to the present day and relate them to artificial intelligence and modern biotechnologies, genetic engineering, and the existence of life created through technology. Further research, with a focus on feminism, posthumanism, and psychoanalysis, or the disciplines of disability studies and ecocriticism, could also examine other aspects that have not been addressed in this study. Such studies would represent an important contribution in the analysis of how literature challenges the definition of what is human, how the representations of "monsters" reflect different social fears and preoccupations, and how literature explores doubts regarding science, identity, and belonging.

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